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C O N F I D E N T I A L HILLAH 000382

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [EPET](#) [EFIN](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS DIFFER ON OIL PRICE HIKE

CLASSIFIED BY: ALFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(SBU) Summary: Speakers in South Central region mosques variously condemned and approved the recent Ministry of Oil fuel price increase during Friday prayers on December 23. Sadr-and Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq-(SCIRI) affiliated mosques in Najaf criticized the hike, while a representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in Karbala took pains to justify the government's position. Preachers also called for the execution of Saddam Hussein, criticized the Baathists, and urged resistance to the United States. End summary.

12. (C) In Karbala, Sistani Spokesman Shaykh Abdul Mehdi Al-Karbalae spoke to a crowd of approximately 5,000 worshipers at the Imam Hussein shrine. Al-Karbalae explained that the government had raised the oil prices to combat smuggling and the resale of cheap gas on the black market, and also to raise money to repay Iraq's international debts. At the same time, Al-Karbalae urged the government to be compassionate towards the needs of the people, and to do a better job of explaining its decisions.

13. (C) In Najaf Province, speakers took an opposing view. At the SCIRI-affiliated Husseinia Al-Fatimi Mosque, Sadr Al-Deen Al-Qubani condemned the price hike before an audience of about 700 worshipers. At the Moqtada Al-Sadr-affiliated Kufa Mosque, attended by about 1500 congregants, Shaykh Salah Al-Ubaidi also criticized the price increase, and called for nationwide public protests against the decision.

14. (C) Al-Qubani also called for the execution of Saddam Hussein and the continuation of the Iraqi government's Debaathification program, and criticized U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for the Ambassador's recent comments, which the preacher perceived as critical of the Iraqi Minister of the Interior, Bayan Jabr. Al-Ubaidi, preaching in Kufa, also warned against Baathists, lobbied for Ibrahim Jaafari to remain Prime Minister in the new Iraqi Government, and condemned raids and arrests directed against Sadrist by Coalition Forces

15. (C) Elsewhere, mosques took up different themes. In Wasit Province, the speaker at the Sadrist Al-Kut Al-Kabeer Mosque called upon the approximately 1,500 worshippers to fight corruption, resist the United States, which he referred to as the "Great Transgressor," and to defy "Wahabbis" and "Salafis" who would tarnish the reputation of Islam as a moderate, peaceful religion. In Al-Hillah, Babil Province, the preacher at the Sadr-affiliated Imam Ali Mosque called for the preservation of Muslim unity and identity.

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